

An ongoing mentality

Achan was guilty of holding one of the trademark beliefs of our age, namely, that personal happiness and fulfillment should override every other consideration. This mentality has devastating ramifications for society in general, but it is particularly damaging when it crops up in the church. After all, the people of God are in a situation not unlike the one Israel of old was in. Just as God clearly made his will known to them regarding the spoils of Jericho, so he has made his will known to us on a wide array of matters. And just as he prized those people and desired to work through them, so he prizes the church today. He has purchased her at a very dear price, the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. He tenderly regards her as a father does his children. She is the apple of his eye and her name is inscribed on the palms of his hands.¹

The sin (Josh. 7:20–21).

Achan heard his commander give the order that all the spoils in Jericho were to be devoted to the Lord and were to go into His treasury (6:17–21, 24). Since Jericho was Israel’s first victory in Canaan, the first fruits of the spoils belonged to the Lord (Prov. 3:9). But Achan disobeyed and took the hazardous steps that lead to sin and death (James 1:13–15): “I saw ... I coveted ... [I] took” (Josh. 7:21). Eve did the same thing when she listened to *the devil* (Gen. 3:5), and so did David when he yielded to *the flesh* (2 Sam. 11:1–4). Since Achan also coveted the things of *the world*, he brought defeat to Israel and death to himself and his family.

Achan’s *first* mistake was to look at these spoils a *second time*. He probably couldn’t help seeing them the first time, but he should never have looked again and considered taking them. A man’s first glance at a woman may say to him, “She’s attractive!” But it’s that second glance that gets the imagination working and leads to sin (Matt. 6:27–30). If we keep God’s Word before our eyes, we won’t start looking in the wrong direction and doing the wrong things (Prov. 4:20–25).

His *second* mistake was to *reclassify* those treasures and call them “the spoils” (Josh. 7:21). They were not “the spoils”; they were a part of the Lord’s treasury and wholly dedicated to Him. They didn’t belong to Achan, or even to Israel; they belonged to God. When God identifies something in a special way, we have no right to change it. In our world today, including the religious world, people are rewriting God’s dictionary! “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa. 5:20, KJV) If God says something is wrong, then it’s wrong; and that’s the end of the debate.

Achan’s *third* mistake was to *covet*. James 1:14. Instead of singing praises in his heart for the great victory God had given, Achan was imagining in his heart what it would be like to own all that treasure. The imagination is the “womb” in which desire is conceived and from which sin and death are eventually born.

His *fourth* mistake was to think that he could get away with his sin by hiding the loot. Adam and Eve tried to cover their sin and run away and hide, but the Lord discovered them. Gen. 3:7 “Be sure your sin will find you out” was originally said to the people of God, not to the lost (Num. 32:23); Deut. 32:36; Heb. 10:30. How foolish of Achan to think that God couldn’t see what he was doing, when “all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13, NKJV).

The Lord had accepted Achan as a son of the covenant at Gilgal. Yet in spite of all these wonderful experiences, Achan disobeyed God just to possess some wealth that he couldn’t even enjoy. Had he waited just a day or two, he could have gathered all the spoils he wanted from the victory at Ai! Matt. 6:33²

¹ Ellsworth, R. (2008). *Opening up Joshua*. Opening Up Commentary (75). Leominster: Day One Publications.

² Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Strong*. “Be” Commentary Series (84–85). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.